

We Claim:

1. A decoding apparatus providing decoding protection, for operating on information which is transferred through a medium and comprises main data which are to be decoded, the apparatus comprising:

means for detecting protection data which are also transferred through said medium;

means for limiting reproduction based upon at least a film classification system;

means for generating apparatus protection data which comprise at least first apparatus protection data and second apparatus protection data,

wherein said first apparatus protection data are specific to a region or a country in which said decoding apparatus is to be used, said first apparatus protection data being fixed and unmodifiable by a user of said decoding apparatus and said second apparatus protection data being modifiable by the user to selectively define a plurality of protection levels including at least two levels which are respectively specific to adults and to children;

means for defining a protection level based on said protection data and on said apparatus protection data, in combination; and

means for executing decoding of said main data in accordance with said protection level,

wherein the combination of said protection data and said first apparatus protection data specifies that said main data are decoded either in their entirety or not at all, and the combination of said protection data and said second apparatus protection data specifies that said main data are decoded in their entirety, partially, or not at all,

wherein said data medium transfers both said medium protection data and said main data in an identical form.

2. A decoding apparatus as recited in claim 1, wherein said means for executing operates in response to said combination of said medium protection data with said first apparatus protection data to cause said decoding apparatus to decode said main data either in their entirety or not at all,

said means for executing operating in response to said combination of said medium protection data and said second apparatus protection data to cause said decoding apparatus to decode said main data in their entirety, partially, or not at all.